

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director Neighbourhoods and Environment

To

Cabinet

On

2 November 2021

Report prepared by: Chris Read, Service Manager for Highways & Asset Management

Agenda
Item No.

Highways Safety Improvements

Place Scrutiny Committee

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ron Woodley

Deputy Leader (Cabinet Member for Transport, Capital & Inward Investment)

Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Following the major reorganisation of the Highways Department a review has been conducted by the Head of Service and relevant Service managers of how Highways Improvement Schemes are identified, prioritised and delivered.
- 1.2 An outcome of this review has been the need for a new process for the proposal and prioritisation of the Highways Improvement Schemes that is clear, transparent, coordinated and sustainable and which aligns with the Administration's priorities.
- 1.3 This report concentrates on the overriding policy and its enabling implementation plans covering key issues and improvements across the borough.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Cabinet is asked to consider and agree the new Highway Improvements Policy for the prioritisation and implementation of Highways Improvement Schemes.
- 2.2 In addition, Cabinet is asked to delegate authority to the Director of Highways to deliver the policy in accordance with agreed implementation plans for the various service area assets/issues.

3. Background

- 3.1 Highways Improvement Schemes are changes to the existing highway infrastructure to improve the experience of the road user and/or community.

They can range from minor road junction or footway improvements to full resurfacing scheme, cycling schemes, traffic calming and public realm schemes.

- 3.2 Highways Improvement Schemes are being received into the Highways Department on a daily basis with schemes also being identified through the Traffic Regulations Working Party (TRWP).

- 3.3 Typically the type of improvement works can include pedestrian crossings, cycling facilities, new footways, school safety measures, traffic management and town enhancements, grass verge improvements, Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) based solutions such as speed reduction and parking protection.

- 3.4 Highways Improvement Schemes can be complex in nature consisting of activities such as consultations, legal orders, land acquisition, mobilising consultants and adhering to the terms of our Highways Term Contract, and for these reasons the delivery of schemes, once started, can typically take between 2 to 4 years.

- 3.5 As there is currently no limit to the costs of schemes that can be proposed as priority, individual schemes on the list have ranged in value from several thousand pounds to several million pounds.

- 3.6 In recent times there has been ad hoc requests for capital funding of individual schemes that has been available in total for these schemes and would normally take several years to address all the current priorities.

- 3.7 With no formal borough-wide prioritisation, schemes have been delivered on a 'first-come first-served' basis, without demonstrating value for money, level of need or demand on resources.

- 3.8 It should be noted that some highway schemes identified through grant funding and in s106 agreements are fully funded by developers and that the Borough has a legal obligation to deliver them. As the nature and cost of such schemes is prescribed in the s106 agreement, there is no discretion about how the funds can be spent. As schemes explicitly detailed in s106 agreements cannot be altered or changed and the agreement legally obligates Southend to deliver them they are therefore excluded from this process.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 The proposed new process concerns the assessment and prioritisation of Highway Improvement Schemes requested by residents, Ward Councillors,

Businesses and other stakeholders. It will include the normal annual resurfacing schemes for carriageway and footway. In addition, it includes issues highlighted by Highways Inspectors and officers that don't require an immediate response and those schemes identified as part of resurfacing programme.

- 4.2 The new process seeks to introduce a logical procedure and clear criteria that provides greater clarity, understanding and certainty to Members and residents. The policy will dictate the process taken but will be implemented by individual implementation plans for each asset/issue. The intention is that these plans provide a clear and transparent system of scoring highway improvement proposals. The policy and processes will allow the authority to effectively manage and prioritise its resources.
- 4.3 The new process will operate in accordance with the principles detailed in the policy (Appendix 1) and will enable one overall priority list to be developed, which can also be separated by asset or street depending on budget availability. The ability to separate by street will enable integrated schemes to be developed, which will operate a 'close once, fix many' approach bringing less disruption for residents/users and obvious cost efficiencies. This process is due to commence immediately following approval of this report and is anticipated to fully operational from the 2022/23 programme and onwards.

5. Options Considered

- 5.1 the following options have been considered:

Option 1 – equal monetary share to each Ward

This option would allocate each Ward an equitable budget (excluding any available s106 funds within their area) so that each Ward has the opportunity to select a maximum number of proposals each year, to this value, subject to scoring the proposals using the agreed priority scoring matrix.

Option 2 – Prioritised risk based approach

This option would develop a programme based on the highest scoring priorities boroughwide, and in accordance with the resources available. All requests would be assessed against the scoring matrix and the resulting priority score used as a basis for setting an annual forward programme.

- 5.2 The service concludes that option 1 was not sustainable and resulted in long lists of schemes that are progressed irrespective of the estimated cost, making resource plans and forward programmes difficult. It is also felt that this approach could result in funds being allocated to schemes, where potentially there are higher risks elsewhere and consequently putting the council at risk in the event of an incident.
- 5.3 Option 2 is the preferred service options as this ensures the Highways Department allocates resource and budget where required borough wide. This option would also ensure a fair and transparent service delivery borough wide against a set criteria and cost efficiencies to be made.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map.

- 6.1.1. This process links into Safe & Well by better predicting the required areas for remedial works and aligning that against risk to ensure that our network is in the required condition for our residents to use without the risk of incident.
- 6.1.2. In addition, we will look to use advances in technology to align with Connected & Smart vision to ensure that we are able to streamline our processes and bring cost efficiencies where possible.

6.2 Financial Implications

- 6.2.1 No negative cost implications, as all improvements form part of our normal highway service and associated condition surveys. It will be able to bring efficiencies to working practices and key in providing value for money. Longer term, the cost savings would be made by reducing reactive maintenance budgets and by utilising integrated repair schemes.

6.3 Legal Implications

- 6.3.1 No legal implications as this system complies with current Codes of Practice and best practice.

6.4 People Implications

- 6.4.1 Works required to implement the changes will be undertaken by existing staff resources.

6.5 Property Implications

- 6.5.1 None

6.6 Consultation

- 6.6.1 None

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.7.1 Any implications have been taken into account in designing the review.

6.8 Risk Assessment

- 6.8.1 The proposals are designed to improve the highway and as such, is likely to have a positive impact and reduce risk.

6.9 Value for Money

- 6.9.1 Works associated with any proposed findings will be undertaken by the Council's term contractors, selected through a competitive tendering process to ensure value for money. In addition integrated schemes can only bring cost benefits

6.10 Community Safety Implications

- 6.10.1 The proposed network improvement will lead to improved community safety.

6.11 Environmental Impact

- 6.11.1 Reviews will give us a better understanding, but the potential environmental impact is not known at this stage. It is envisaged that there could be a potential improvement if traffic flows across the borough are improved and reduced works required through integrated schemes.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendix

Appendix A – Highways Improvements Policy.